



News Release

For immediate release: October 5, 2009

(09-162)

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Health improvements win recognition for two Washington communities

Moses Lake, Mount Vernon-Skagit County receive awards at statewide conference

OLYMPIA — This morning at the Joint Conference on Health in Yakima, the Washington State Department of Health recognized strides made by Moses Lake and Mount Vernon-Skagit County to improve the health of people who live in those communities.

Representatives of the two pioneering Healthy Communities projects were awarded colorful roadway signs designating each as Healthy Communities. State health officials also announced that five new Healthy Communities would be funded in October — in Adams, Asotin, Garfield, Grays Harbor, and Pacific counties.

The City of Moses Lake has shown that a small amount of money and a lot of community work can make a difference in the health of the people who live there. A survey of more than 600 people in the community of 25,592 found that obesity rates in Moses Lake leveled off in 2007. Rates in the state overall increased during the same time, 2003 to 2007.

“The results we’re seeing in Moses Lake can be traced to hard work and dedication of the people in that community over the past seven years,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “The city council in Moses Lake made it a priority to help local residents be healthy. This is a great example of the strides we can make by working together to improve the public’s health.”

Mount Vernon and surrounding Skagit County have made remarkable progress, too, including completing a countywide network of trails and bicycle paths. They also formed partnerships among local farmers, the local hospital, and schools to make locally grown and produced foods more available.

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Both Moses Lake and Mount Vernon have made changes in streets to make them accessible to walkers and bicycle riders, improved downtown areas to make them more pedestrian-friendly, and added trails. And they worked with schools to increase the number of students who bike or walk to campus. Moses Lake created a downtown community garden. Mount Vernon improved access to a downtown farmers market, and started a new market at Skagit Valley Hospital.

The 2008 Moses Lake survey also found that people are eating more fruits and vegetables, an important part of turning around the obesity epidemic. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey that produced the information is an annual telephone survey funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Healthy Communities Washington is an initiative of the state Department of Health to prevent and control chronic diseases at the community level, where people can be supported with healthy choices and good health care. Most of Washington's top killers – cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and asthma – have common root causes: smoking, poor diet, physical inactivity, and lack of early disease screening. The Healthy Communities project funds local work to support health through community policy and environmental improvements.

The first Healthy Communities projects in Moses Lakes and Mount Vernon-Skagit County were funded at \$50,000 each year from 2003 through 2008. The projects have continued with local support. The Department of Health currently funds 17 Health Communities Washington projects. In addition to the counties recently funded, the agency supports Healthy Communities projects in Spokane, Kittitas, Snohomish, King, Island, Cowlitz, Yakima, Pierce, and Skagit counties, and the Lummi Nation.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a <i>healthy dose of information</i> .
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